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GEORGE MEREDITH, NOVELIST AND POET.

## I. THE QUALITY OF MR. MEREDITH.

The failure in the case of George Meredith of any wide popular acceptance is a fact neither regrettable nor inexplicable. The reason comprehends much, but it is not far to seek. It lies in the intrinsic nature of the method, which is strangely novel, and of a treatment illuminated by a strikingly fresh vision. It involves and illustrates the truth, somewhat indifferently comprehended, that the highest intellectual range implies, as a condition of being, a very great complexity, an unusual subtlety, an indirect poetic or symbolic meaning which is "caviare to the general." It does not appeal to the blunt, lumbering appreciations of the masses. Professor Gates, of Harvard, has allowed himself to express the wish that Meredith would speak to us with a more obvious and resounding voice, would occasionally "mitigate the rancor of his tongue," that he might attract a larger audience. Finding him so vital and bracing, he regrets that, because of the very brilliancy and unwonted splendor of his style, he can be known in but a limited circle. But this is true of every original genius who is courageous enough to admit of no compromise with usage and convention in the matter of presentation. The creative artist is highly preoccupied with the dominant matter, preserves it with singular purpose—that of a thoroughly sentient and individual expression. It is, of course, the main concern to get himself adequately expressed. It is often, as in the case of Flaubert, of Carlyle, and many another, a tortuous labor; but if he turns aside, if he heeds the slightest or the most inces-

sant clamor, he thus far proves that his title is somewhere defective. Such pursuit, such singleness of aim, is one of the finest spectacles which literature affords.

No writer whose work deserves permanence is satisfied with any but the most exact and scrupulous utterance. He is never, I affirm, guilty of willful inadequacy of phrase, or "willful obscurity," as was charged against Browning. If so, then the proof is positive that both the purpose and achievement suffer so far; and the purpose was probably never characterized by what, according to Matthew Arnold's fine phrase, would be called a "high seriousness," and the achievement, hence, is neither memorable nor great. No art worthy the name ever results from conscious affectation of manner. The true artist regards his materials with conscientious concern. Though gifted with voice and vision, he is yet a patient worker, his purpose being to extract from his medium the most consummate results possible. We have no finer instance of fidelity to the art ideal of independent expression of personality than in the case of Meredith. He began to publish before George Eliot wrote her first novel, but even yet appreciation of him is chiefly confined to the literary class. Not that his work is not vigorously human; his words are so full of the pulse of life that, as some one has said: "Cut them, and they will bleed." Among the supremely great, there are many writers whose appeal can never be to the masses, yet whose message is invaluable. It is of such fiber that it cannot be expressed in the current mode. Of such is George Meredith. He is indubitably the writer's writer, just as Browning is the "poet's poet." He exists for educated people, and his brave and sane philosophy of life will finally filter through the work of others, so to speak, and reach the people as it influences others. Or he will doubtless be more and more read as the world grows to comprehend him, for he allows and welcomes endless vistas of intellectual growth.

It is trite enough, but true, that a man expresses just the thing he sees and at just the angle of his vision, and the style is a part of the conception. Style is conceived by

some to be a thing of fixed rules, a certain uniform, equal employment of words, based upon contemporary standards. But these formulæ were framed for the worshipping throng of the mediocre, and built upon past accepted models; they cannot, in the nature of things, be more than nominally applicable to the independent creators yet to be—the “clamorous children of history.” May not the artist arrogate to himself as much freedom in matters of form as in the field of imaginative thought itself? However, the practice of such freedom often blinds the critic. He does not understand the sources of inspiration. In the interpretation of such work as that of Browning, of Whitman, and of Meredith, the distinction of quality in each is lost sight of. Critics are disconcerted by direct and stinging utterance which flaunts a new manner in the face of tradition. It is a manner which, as Mr. Sharp says, speaking of Browning, “involves the construction of a new definition,” and inevitably broadens the domain of art. Wordsworth enriched poetry immeasurably, just as Whitman and Browning have done; but it remained for George Meredith to enrich English prose with all poetic measures, to introduce the poetic and imaginative method in prose. He enriched it with the language of German mysticism, of which he had been a faithful student, with the language of the truest nature poetry, always guided by the sure insight and sensitiveness of the scholar. In the hands of such as Meredith language is a thing alive. How luminous, when once you get the secret of his manner! How finely and subtly illuminating!

It is the intellectual quality in Meredith which is first in evidence; but he is not as Whitman said of Emerson, “dominated by bloodless intellectuality.” He does not represent sublimated intellectual interests alone. All that is genuine and vital in human life, all that is powerful and strenuous in character and achievement, finds subtlest embodiment in Meredith’s work. Nowhere is the luminosity of pure intellect so united with what I should call the athletic in soul and sense and body. Not Whitman himself was more interested

in the elemental phase, the highest intelligence combined with the greatest amount of pure force. It is an intellectual and a real aristocracy, a race of brawny men and strong, sane-minded women, that he gives us. Power, after all, is the thing which Meredith admires; power and courage. He pictures men and women in the stress of supreme endeavor, fired by great passions, guided by marvelous intellectual gifts; and his concern is always with the inmost soul life, the spiritual issue. Stirring adventure there is in abundance, but it has its place merely in the development of character. Not through adventure alone, not through lively experiences and dramatic situations, which seems largely Stevenson's method, does Meredith reveal the inner springs. His method is far more varied and penetrating. He is at once subjective and objective, dramatic and subtly analytical. He had great imagination, was a poet to begin with, and he became in prose, indeed, if not in poetry, "the subtlest analyst of the soul," as was said of Browning, since Shakspeare.

And Meredith's dramatic power is as remarkable as his gift of insight is acute, his analysis searching. I know of no more thrillingly dramatic story than "Vittoria." It is teeming with action, passion, and incident. It is real, as "real as laughter," or rather as tears, because it is a tragic book. Here is a prose that seems not to have been written; there is no evidence of a conscious style. It is so redolent of the place and moment, so stamped with the vivid and tumultuous reality. Every word is an image, and the cumulative effect of burning images, wrought with all the splendor of a great imagination, is absolutely beyond the power of words, except those of Meredith, to portray. "Vittoria" is perhaps the most intensely moving of all of Meredith's works. It is great achievement of the purely dramatic kind. Yet even in this novel, which is one of adventure, the intellectual quality is not lacking. He is an artist primarily, here as elsewhere, an artist thoroughly acquainted with the power of words, feeling them with the sensitiveness of the artist, knowing their varied undercurrents of meaning with

the certainty of the scholar, and employing them with great license as only the poetic imagination can.

The notable thing about Meredith is the quality of distinction. It is present in every line he writes. It is of the force and clarity of a superior intelligence that I speak, of an illumined vision. He gives us glimpses of an intensely alive, very robust intellectual life, and the English aristocracy, under his limning, upon the intellectual side, assumes the color of the ideal. What depth on depth of tone! The characters, how strong and sure and capable! He combines a realistic with an impressionist picture. It is scarcely an idealization. You see it in all its richness, in all its huge banality and arrogance, its egotism and self-assurance. His superbest men and women are not of the aristocracy, a fact which illustrates a theory of his, variously phrased, that the absolute freedom of the individual is essential to the finest development, and not least of all, freedom from the caste spirit and petty self-worship. He prefers to give us the exceptional phase, not the typical. He avoids both the prosiness of "dirty drab" methods of fiction and the false coloring of the "rose pink;" thus he is neither realist nor sentimentalist. "Idea," he says, "is the vital breath." We must have something that is nourishing to brains. It is through intellect that man reaches upward. Soul life suffers and starves where intellect is unillumined. "We have little to learn from apes," he says. We do not read such books as "The Egoist," however, without learning much of the pitfalls of mere cleverness, when united to pettiness of nature.

Meredith has no exclusive standards. He sounds myriad depths, and has great human sympathy. He is at once an analyst and a scholar, and the scholarly ideal is ever present—strength of trained intellect with greatness of soul. He combines the qualities of the scholarly conscience with the primitive and universal human. There is a rank flavor of the soil in his characters; and he seems, above all, to relish as much as Stevenson, but with a difference, the portrayal of superb, brawny natures. The difference I

speak of is in the intellectual quality. Take the chief characters in "The Amazing Marriage," which is one of the most virile of Meredith's books, Chillon and Corinthia, and Lord Fleetwood—these three, a challenge to modern fiction to produce their equals! Where can we go to find such creations out of Shakspeare? They do not exist. No dramatic writer of the century has produced them. Such is the power of portrayal, such the reality of the conception, that the characters outline themselves in one's memory like acquaintances, rare spirits that one has known in some happier past—the radiant Sandra, Clara Middleton, the unspeakably charming Diana, the Countess de Sablo, the family of the indigent Poles (creations as real as any), the sentimentalists, Richard and Lucy, and those real grotesques, worthy of Dickens, Mrs. Chump and Mrs. Berry. All these characters are richly human, yet so clever and brilliant is the medium through which we learn to know them that they are somehow a space removed from our everyday and commonplace appreciations. It is because of this that Meredith is found so fatiguing by persons who prefer to be lulled in their reading rather than compelled to exercise their brains.

Intellectual acuteness and a fine subtlety of apprehension are primal characteristics in Meredith. The intellect, he knows, is the final arbiter. This note is no mere bookish quality, nor an exclusive note of culture; far from it. Meredith is immensely objective, and has a superb dramatic gift. Yet he seeks the inner vision; he is finely subjective withal. He penetrates to the springs of action. The difficulties with him are the result of a severe compression of style, an extreme brilliancy of surface, the signal achievement of at once giving the picture with the vividness of true impressionism and sounding beneath the outer semblance to the inner motives. He gives a searching *exposé* of the deep down, inscrutable problems of the human heart. He fails not to record the life he knows as a pageant, too; at the same time he is not content with that. How mercilessly he delves and delves! One feels a great sickening pity for the Egoist, so

remorselessly does he lay bare all the inner workings of the man. The portrayal is so convincing that absolutely before the novel is finished the Egoist becomes as a part of our own experience, and we feel that we know the huge selfishness and egotism, and so perfectly the whole nature of the man, that we are willing to be well quit of him, but with a feeling amounting to sincere compassion. And herein is an evidence not only of Meredith's power, but of the real humanity animating every page he writes. He is no cynic, though he probes to the heart, even of cynicism, and shows that the human pulse beats there. Adrian Harley is his typical cynic, acid, brilliant, philosophic; and yet we are allowed to look into the heart of the man, to discern the soul there, disguised in bitterness; and we understand, we recognize our own kinship. So in "The Egoist," which is a bitter tonic for our self-conscious age. It is unique for its psychological value. In truth, it holds up to us the mirror of self, the *bête noire* of humanity, and compels poignant self-scrutiny and self-confession. "The Egoist" is his most characteristic production, the most brilliantly subtle novel, some of us think, of the century.

Meredith's appeal is indubitably to the intellectual class, "the acute and honorable minority." Perhaps he will never reach the masses. I aver that it is no matter of regret that he does not and never can. Much has been written about simplicity and the elemental in literature, that the author or poet is greatest who has the widest appeal. This, however, is a commonly accepted, critical truism, which, like all half truths, is misleading. The intellectual is no less human than the less rare quality of forthright simplicity. Breadth of sympathy, not breadth of appeal, must be the real test. The true intellectual is not more than remotely allied to the dead-alive book worship, the pedantry, of the schools; and failure to attract the crowd of curious nibblers may not be explained on grounds of artificiality and remoteness from real life.

In proportion as the perception is acute, the conception poetic and suggestive, is the presentation metaphorical and



variable, confusing to the sluggish sense. Meredith, not being content with the shining surface of things, like the myriad writers who have long ago reached the popular ear, plunged beneath and penetrated depths denied to others, and by methods thrillingly new. He was compelled thus to create a new imagery and language, and this he did with a courage and a brilliancy, a depth and imaginative reach unmatched in modern letters.

He comprehended English social life, saw and knew it from height to depth, in all its glamour and huge pretentiousness, as none other has done. He discerned it, but not only as an observer, nor was he ingulfed by it. He portrayed with an appealing human touch, vouchsafed alone to the great artist.

The test of ability to appreciate Meredith is vitality in the reader. One cannot read him in a mood of relaxation nor to while away an idle afternoon. He gives us an intellectual tonic; yet the reader must be alive, alert, and willing even to follow the author down "woeful, dark ways of flinty diction." His reward, a rich, unspeakable zest, which the sense of power and fresh initiative always gives, will come later, and he will thank the happy fortune which led him to this new fount of inspiration. We have not fallen upon sterile and degenerate days—such work as this proves it. One can read him only in clearest moments of energetic thought, and even in the best of moods he will be found occasionally baffling. He keeps to the high and sublimated pitch, and never for a moment relaxes. In this way it is a task to read him, because he demands much of the reader. He flashes an image or an incident, a trait or a fancy, before us like an electric spark, with audacious metaphor. His method is the poetic. Indeed, Meredith is a poet above all, and only secondarily a writer of prose; and it is probably true, as some one has said, that it takes a poet to appreciate a poet. That doubtless explains why Meredith finds his most ardent worshipers among poets like Swinburne, who said of the sonnet in "Modern Love," beginning

We saw the swallows gathering in the sky,

"A more perfect piece of writing no man alive has ever turned out."

After all, the poets who are guided by the imaginative sense of things, what Pater calls their "peculiar sense of fact," as far removed as possible from realism, a word which has little significance, are, in truth, the most real. The poets know and discern the facts of life, the reality of existence, intuitively; and with such vision, as vouchsafed to them, their personal, artistic, poetic sense of fact is more important to us than the facts themselves. What are facts, what is life, without its proper artistic interpretation? The world is uplifted mainly by such illumination of the materials of existence.

"Sacred reality!" exclaims George Meredith, the one thing worthy of worship. Of this he is enamored. As was said of Sophocles, with whom there is traceable an interesting kinship, he sees life steadily and sees it whole. Withal he finds it full of significance. He has an unfaltering faith, and behind that the "soul of things is good." He says:

All forces that make us are one full stream.

And further:

By my faith there is feasting to come,  
Not the less when our Earth we have seen  
Beneath and on surface, her deeds and designs:  
Who gives us the man-loving Nazarene,  
The martyrs, the poets, the corn, and the vines.  
.  
Then the meaning of Earth in her children behold—  
Glad eyes, frank hands, and a fellowship real,  
And laughter on lips, as the birds outburst  
At the flooding of light.

But we need the scourge of reality, a return to earth, to cure us of our delusions.

But first, that the poisonous of thee be purged,  
Go into thyself, strike Earth.

"Never," he says, "is Earth misread by brain." Everywhere he admonishes of the lesson of earth, and finds in

the study of nature, her throes and sterner moods, the meaning that

Contention is the vital force.

He finds other meanings, but in "The Faith on Trial," one of the most uplifting poems ever written, he expresses life's austere purposes as he conceives them:

Harsh wisdom gives Earth no more;  
In one the spur and the curb:  
An answer to thoughts or deeds,  
To the Legends an alien look,  
To the Questions a figure of clay.  
Yet we have but to see and hear,  
Crave we her medical herb,  
For the road to her soul is the real.

JAMES WALTER YOUNG.

## II. THE OPTIMISM OF GEORGE MEREDITH.

The reading public as a whole were never much addicted to early rising. They are deaf, usually, to the persistent crowing of literary cocks. For them the lifting of heavy eyelids constitutes sunrise. It has happened sundry times, therefore, that long after the strutting fowl of the barnyard had ceased to make any further vocal efforts at arousing the somnolent, a poet's genius did not appear as it should have done, dutifully meek at the horizon, but has most disagreeably flashed all at once from the zenith, as if expressly created there on the spot out of nothing by some piece of critical legerdemain! Then, to have the startled public assure one that this particular orb of genius is unbecomingly sudden in its celestial *début*, and not very considerate of eyes unused to high light, is apt to divert not a little the malicious on-looker.

The public—so far as Meredith is concerned—are at last aroused. They have rubbed—nay, opened—their eyes; they have yawned and stretched, and lo, a new star in the border sky of Great Britain! An edition of select poems for readers equally select is the commercial consequence. Perhaps, however, one of those critics who crowed himself hoarse all but in vain a little while ago may claim that the publication

in question was the rude punch in the comfortable ribs that finally awoke the snorer. Be that, however, as it may. Let them fight it out together—half-awake public and throat-sore critics. It may serve to put the contestants in full possession of their wits, and obviate any fatal relapse into the arms of Morpheus.

It is surely a good while, at all events, since the student of Meredith's unique novels became aware that his master, philosopher though he might be termed—psychologist and moralist in any case—is essentially a child of the Muse; a perverse one, it may be, lost in the far country of abstruse reasoning, but none the less beloved of her. Who ever read of Richard and Lucy and their young love, and failed to know the poet? Just as Browning presumed that "care for a man and his work" should assist the reader in overcoming what "defects of expression" might inhere in his poem, and refused such a revision of his first conception as should make it a different thing, so Meredith was no producer of wares for the bookseller. He too did his best, and was content to abide the issue of the mute controversy between him and the public that would not read him.

No advantage will be gained by the advocate of Meredith's cause as a great writer if he claims for his style simplicity in the sense of perspicuousness. Far more helpful will it be to offer a few suggestions as to the nature and cause of its obscurity than to spend breath in denial, futile, however sincere. And surely it were well worth while to prove that, if "defects of expression" are admittedly his, they are such as might be reasonably expected in a poet who should at the same time be an acute thinker, in one who is impelled to clothe original thought with a body of original diction prepared expressly for it. What is to be conveyed and the verbal vehicle are equally unfamiliar. Now the ordinary reader likes commonplace thought in novel language, or startling conceptions in conventional words; and no one surely should blame such as cannot swim for refusing to venture out of their depth without a life-preserver.

*1. Style.*

Some of Meredith's poem's are not understood even by a scrupulous student till he has reached for the sixth or seventh time the last word. It may be that we moderns have lost and not rediscovered the "art of reading," or it may be that our poet's modes of utterance are peculiar. A wag-gish acquaintance of the present writer demanded of his bookseller a special discount when purchasing "A Reading of the Earth" on the score of the omitted words he should have to supply for himself. Yet, since the compositor is paid at no higher rate for the visible type than for the clear space after each line of verse, on the principle, doubtless, that the suggestively vague is fully as much prized by the poetic connoisseur as the precisely defined, it was evidently unreasonable to imagine that economic reasons had induced this writer to practice such cruel excision. Certain it is, however, that stolen articles and particles, missing pronouns, verbs, and nouns, are often solely responsible for our initial despair! In many cases a freer distribution even of commas, parentheses, or dashes, a charity of coppers in a good stylist, would help the average reader's poverty of wit not a little, and at all events preserve him from precipitate suicide. In my own case (and no one should presume to speak for another) it is not the strictly philosophical passages that have occasioned most perplexity. It was, as a rule, when describing common phenomena of nature that our poet forced me to count my readings of a passage by the score. It would seem as if a frantic dread of the commonplace had made our author flee into remote fastnesses of unintelligible metaphor, impregnable fortified besides by impossible syntax.

May one venture on a figurative account of what rarely happens? Mr. George Meredith in the sanctuary of his poetical consciousness, remote from the vulgar world, lawfully affiances and marries a feeling or an idea to an image. They are in his sight thenceforth one flesh. For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, till death them do part, they are inseparable, nay—cannot even for a moment be imag-

ined otherwise than together. Consequently he feels that he has done his full duty by us noninitiates when he sets but one striking word in a verse of his poem that has reference to some particular feature, say, of the image, the bride. If you are shrewd enough to see before you, as you undoubtedly should, the image in its entirety, the bride in all her beauty, with the one feature, definitely represented by a word in the verse especially prominent, it is yet by no means certain that you will be visited at once by a mental vision also of the lawful husband of the image—the feeling or idea. In spite of all Platonic fictions, it were unsafe to infer the nature of the groom from your acquaintance with the bride. The fate which presides over human matings is proverbially ironical. In the case of the marriages between word images and feelings or ideas, at which as poetic high priest Mr. Meredith officiates, the secret of their mutual fitness, and of the due performance of the binding rites also, is too often his and theirs alone. However, after patiently studying the master and his undoubtedly peculiar ways, one becomes so used to expecting the unexpected as to be seldom disappointed.

In a word, then, the first source of the reader's perplexity is undoubtedly found in our poet's vivid metaphors, though these are in themselves, one must admit, very beautiful or very strong.

I gazed, unaware  
How a shaft of the blossoming tree  
Was shot from the yew wood's core.

(“The Trial of Faith.” R.<sup>1</sup>)

The wild cherry tree was startlingly outlined by the somber, evergreen background. The yew suggested the bow. The rays of light from the bloom were the arrows. Yes this is a wonderful figure, in itself a poem; for the yew in turn becomes the symbol of the poet's battle with tempestuous

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<sup>1</sup>Quotations in this paper are chiefly from three volumes: “Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth,” J.; “A Reading of Earth,” R.; “Modern Love, to which is added The Sage Enamored of the Honest Lady,” M. L. When quotations are made from poems included in the selection, the title is given instead of page reference.

sorrow, the gloom of bereavement needed to set off the joy of spiritual life into divine relief. Such an involution of soul into a bit of landscape does more than amaze. Nor is it uncommon in the philosophic poems of our author, though not always as fortunate in its æsthetic result as this oft quoted instance:

Strange,  
When it strikes to within, is the known;  
Richer than newness revealed. (R., p. 81.)

Indeed, he makes familiar aspects of nature "strike within us," and we are grateful to him.

Another and less legitimate source of perplexity must, however, be pointed out. Often the less obvious, the more delightful a metaphor in the end. But most of us have come to think it a matter of good breeding in metaphors to present themselves singly. In Meredith's poems they come hand in hand, and close on one another's heels.

The fact is, analysis has gone so far with Meredith that the sentence is no longer the poetic unit. If, therefore, one figure should, in his expression of a simple thought, best fit the subject, while quite another is most suited to the predicate, he will not scruple to do separate justice to subject and predicate by arraying each in its most becoming garb, even if the sentence as a whole shall go motley.

Naught else are we when sailing brave  
Save husks to raise and bid it burn. (R., p. 28.)

In previous lines he had called the "rapture of the forward view" the "freight" of his senses, which are a "ship" "driving shoreward" and doomed to split. The "thought" survives the wreck; "what I am," the senses, must perish. Then follow those two verses which abruptly shift the scenery. We see the ships transformed to "husks," the "thought" cargo to a germ. But the germ's life will rise in due time like a tongue of green flame, and it is therefore said to "burn" before our eyes.

Glimpse of its livingness will wave  
A light the senses can discern  
Across the river of the death,  
Their close.

Here we have once more a sudden shift of the scene. The senses are neither "ship" nor "husk." Behold, they are foot-sore wayfarers. At the river of death they stop dismayed. It is the close of their journey. But ere they drown in their hopeless effort to ford the cold stream, from the other bank, which they may never reach, a "light" they can just discern is "waved" by the "thought" that was before a ship's cargo, and more recently a germ. Now, taken as a whole, this is a tolerably clear case. We can disentangle the knotted threads of metaphor and enjoy each by itself.

Sometimes, however, though they form only a mechanical and not a chemical compound, it is more difficult to isolate the figurative elements.

They have not struck the roots which meet the fires  
Beneath, and bind us fast with Earth. (R., p. 47.)

Such a crowding of metaphors mutually exclusive into one single statement makes severe demands on the reader. If he is to see what the poet saw, and feel what he felt, he will have to restate imaginatively the complete thought as many separate times as there are figures suggested, and, after appreciating the individual effect in turn of all these modes of expression, fuse the effects together in one general impression. Only thus can the abstract, emotive, or intellectual results of the series of poetic visualizations be obtained—a perhaps less poetic result than one large single vision, which should continue in the reader's memory to embody the whole thought or feeling—but one in which we may perhaps have gained as much in life as we have lost in æsthetic repose.

A common delight will drain  
The rank individual fens  
Of a wound refusing to heal  
While the old worm slavers its root. (R., p. 94.)

Here we are made first to think of fens of sorrow drained by dutiful service to reason; then of a wound of sorrow



healed by that service; then of the old worm, self, slaving the root of the sorrow—unless, indeed, the slaving worm of self is to be understood as sorrow's root.

It is easy to see how such a method works confusion. We have here really the "catalogue" of Walt Whitman concealed by a violent, merely formal sentence-structure. Subject and predicate do not in their poetic guise recognize each other. A critic might be pardoned if he should declare that Mr. Meredith's sentences in his philosophical poems are frequently algebraic expressions in need of factoring ere they can be intelligently dealt with, and that he sometimes chuckles audibly at the reader's discomfiture when the method of factoring is far from obvious. You have to meet with passages like this:

On the thread of the pasture you trace,  
By the river, their milk, for miles,  
Spotted once with the English tent,  
In days of the tocsin's alarms,  
To tower of the tallest of piles,  
The country's surveyor breast high.

The general sense is clear, but who is expert algebraist enough to factor it at sight?

Of course the studious reader experiences a certain intellectual satisfaction when he has conscientiously performed his task and proved successful at it; but, to be frank, it is not exactly the kind of satisfaction he has been led to expect from poetry by the past masters of the art.

All this is said by one who fully appreciates what Mr. Meredith has done; who could not possibly content himself with "Modern Love" or a selection; who insists on the value of the philosophic poems. Forewarned is forearmed. If you know the nature of the difficulties, they will not appear so formidable. Besides, you will not then court the humiliation of defeat by attacking the philosophic poems in an hour of mental weakness, when really in need of the rest cure which Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and other mild-mannered physicians of the muse are ready, nay, eager enough to offer.

2. "Man."

Now the object of this paper is to unfold in the poet's own words his philosophy of life. It is the same philosophy that generates the wholesome atmosphere of the novels. From it, as moral deductions, proceed those judgments on the creatures of his imagination, which the reader may take, if unacquainted with his poems, for spontaneous and special oracles, when he does not indeed resent them as irrelevant or captious.

If the difficulties of style that have been frankly admitted keep any from acquainting themselves with these philosophical poems, we shall be tempted to fling at them his own words about the thrush:

Heed him not, the loss is yours!<sup>1</sup>

And if, indeed, as he intimates, he be only

A herald of a million bills,

and their song is to be like his, as presumably it shall (else why should he be at pains to announce them?), does it not seem the part of the wisely valiant man to make terms with this shrill-piping herald, ere the whole army arrives in the arrogance of numbers?

Mine are these new fruitings, rich,  
The simple to the common brings;  
I keep the youth of souls who pitch  
Their joy in this old heart of things.

Who feel the Coming, young as aye,  
Thrice hopeful on the ground we plow;  
Alive for life, awake to die;  
One voice to cheer the seedling Now.<sup>2</sup>

I say but that this love of Earth reveals  
A soul beside our own to quicken, quell,  
Irradiate, and through ruinous floods uplift.<sup>3</sup>

Such is his own account of the special prophetic burden with which he has swung himself into the saddle of his lyric Pegasus. We wish him better luck than that of the grim

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<sup>1</sup> "The Thrush in February," st. 2. <sup>2</sup>*Ib.*, sts. 15, 16. <sup>3</sup>J., p. 179.

rider from the Northland, who scared Europe with ghosts after breaking the back of his good steed.

Should we translate into more prosaic terms the resolution which Mr. Meredith has ventured not only to frame like a brave picture for our contemplation, but actually to send forth into the world of accomplished deeds—we might say that his verse shows such beauties in our common earth, and common human life, as are revealed to the man who is active, courageous, unselfish, hopeful, simple of heart and mind; not as they seem to them who substitute fiction for fact, making “the truth” “according to their thirst;”<sup>1</sup> nor as they seem to those “sons of facts,” “swinish grunTERS” who look on the earth as their “stye;”<sup>2</sup> for our poet sees in earth the mother of man, whom to love is the joy of life, and whom to know, for potentially all that man actually is, constitutes the wisdom which renders this passionate loyal son’s love of her reasonable.

As a poet Mr. Meredith does not, we dare assert, use his rather large terminology with absolute strictness. Yet, in a general way, we have a right to suppose that one who is constantly writing of flesh, blood, senses, lusts, heart, self, personality, bent, instincts, brain, mind, wits, reason, soul, and spirit means something more or less definite by each term. There may be duplicates in the full list. There may be ambiguous uses of some. “Senses” means now the organs and their action; and then the pleasures incident to their action, hence becoming synonymous with flesh, blood, and lusts. “Self” and “personality” may be collective terms for lusts when invading higher domains of our being. “Bent” in the brute may be “instinct” in the man. “Brain,” “mind,” “wits” may be interchangeable terms. “Reason” might connote a distinct faculty, or it might indicate the mode of the mind’s proper action in fellowship with the sensations. “Soul” may designate the purified affections, which, in their crude state, are called the “heart.” “Spirit” is now a term for our love of law, our moral core;

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<sup>1</sup>“A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt,” st. 16.   <sup>2</sup>J., p. 180.

and then it stands for that mystical imagination which dreams through man "the better than man."

In any case we shall not forget that Meredith the poet uses words to content his ear and his fancy quite as often as to gratify Meredith the psychologist.

From flesh unto spirit man grows,  
Even here on the sod under sun. (R., p. 96.)

This is the first article of his creed. Note each word: "Growth," not miraculous change; "here," not hereafter, thanks to the "sod" that supports and the "sun" that gives vital heat. But he is not content with this statement of fact. Some might admit that it "grows" when it chooses. Not so;

Flesh unto spirit *must* grow. (R., p. 39.)

There is no choice, no escape from the beautiful fatality; for contend we shall have to for sheer existence, and

Contention is the vital force  
Whence pluck we brain. (R., p. 11.)

If we look out abroad at humanity in our day with the eye of the true seer, it is "the soul" we perceive "unfold" through "blood and tears." (R., p. 61.) If we look back and follow history to our time, we behold

The tidal multitude, and blind  
From bestial to the higher breed  
By fighting (R., p. 30),

slowly rise, and introspection reveals that

We battle  
For the smallest grain of our worth (R., p. 91),

as well as for the best and most priceless of our treasures:

Wisdom is won of its fight,  
The combat incessant. (R., p. 96.)

Nay, more than this, the highest faculty, which is self of our self, it also,

Spirit, is wrought . . . through strife! (J., p. 159.)

The faculties are related. They derive from one another.

Rose in brain from rose in blood. (J., p. 12.)

They are friendly when kept for mutual service in the right order of subjection.

Just reason based on valiant blood. (R., p. 30.)

Woe to reason, if it fancies justice possible without physical valor! Woe to the blood, if it dares be unjust!

"Sensation is a gracious gift" (R., p. 56); but "sensation insurgent" is "haunted of broods" of questions (R., p. 98) that only confuse sensation. "Brain" is the "sky of the senses" (R., p. 11); they are earth to that sky. Changing the figure, "the senses are the vessel of the thought" (R., p. 28), and they should be "steered by brain" (R., p. 12). But, mark you, what were a helmsman without a ship? In the service of brain "the senses must traverse" the "Road of the Real" "fresh"—not blinded by preconceptions and "with a love" for the road itself that "no scourge shall abate" (R., p. 91)—if we are ever

To reach the lone heights where we scan  
In the mind's rarer vision this flesh. (R., p. 91.)

For while there are "holies from sense withheld," to which only "reason" can guide (R., p. 93), we shall want feet as well as a knowledge of the way.

Futhermore, "mind of man and bent of brute" "equally have root" in earth. (J., p. 23.) Instinct is not to be despised, for it is thus akin to mind. Indeed, "just reason" would be content if it could match "the instinct bred afield" (R., p. 30); and we are warned

Not one instinct to efface,  
Ere reason ripens for the vacant place. (J., p. 169.)

For "reason" is not yet ripe—only "man's" germinant "fruit" (R., p. 91); yet, even now, by it is the "brain" "hourly fed" (R., p. 33).

In its turn the "strong brain" is the "station for the flight of soul" (R., p. 13) in those who have

Out of the sensual hive  
Grown to the flower of brain.

But the soul depends not only on the brain; "the heart,

obedient to brain, prompts the soul." (R., p. 87.) Yet the reason cannot dispense with service of what is higher than it. "No branch of Reason's growing" is to be "lopped." (R., p. 120.) Let, therefore, "spirit but be lord of mind to guide our eyes," and the noblest truths shall in time be ours.

Now it is clear that all the exhortations of the poet would be quite impertinent were nothing amiss with man. It is a fact that something prevents man's "mind bursting the chrysalis of the blind" (J., p. 126) and seeing truly with the aid of spirit. It is the "distempered devil of self," the "glutton" of earth's "fruits."

Clearly enough, never

'Till our lord of sensations at war,  
The rebel, the heart, yields place  
To brain (R., p. 87);

never till we are one of those "who in harness the mind subserve," "having mastered sensation" (R., p. 97), which always, "at a stroke on the terrified nerve," proves "inane," and would counsel some coward's folly; never till then shall we have "earned" our "title" to "*read*" the truth of which the earth is but a glyph. For without the spirit we cannot, and

The spirit comes to light  
Through conquest of the inner beast. (R., p. 11.)

Now though this doctrine gives some place to asceticism, it refuses to view the "beast" that must be conquered, the "sensation" that must be mastered, the "heart" that must be forced to submission, as in themselves evil. They are part of our complete glory. It is only their insubordination that is harmful. Men are indeed to "attain" the "stature of the gods," "not forfeiting the beast." (R., p. 115.) "Mind and body" shall "lute" a "perfect concord." (J., p. 117.) All are given to understand that it is a calamity when even for a moment "the nature" is "divided in three"—"heart," "brain," "soul." (R., p. 78.) The highest of us must cherish the lowest of us in its place and for its function. The "mind" must be solidly built on her

“foundations of earth’s bed” (M. L., p. 80), for then, and then only,

Never is earth misread by brain. (R., p. 11.)

If reason has any preëminent dignity, it is that she is “our bond with the numbers.” (R., p. 93.) She classes us; she insists on fair division; she limits our claim to our share; she

Wrestles with our old worm  
Self in the narrow and wide.  
Relentless quencher of lies,  
With laughter she pierces the brute.

not that she would slay—she has no hate, therefore no murderous intent—only she means to “scour” the “loathed recess of his dens” with that “laughter” which is light. She means to “scatter his monstrous bed” of comfortable sloth, and “hound him to harrow and plow;” for the “self” has work to do. Speculation is not his business. He cannot be allowed to bias the mind by his roars or howls of greed or pain. This “self,” this blind craving, was the driving power. It is that still. But it drives man to ruin unless it remains in gentle control. The steam that can hurry tons of freight upon its way must yet heed the pressure of the engineer’s hand, and bide its time.

If one would be blissful, one must learn to “look on with the soul” (J., p. 6) only, and therefore to “desire” only “with the soul” (J., p. 4), to love with “the love over I and me” (J., p. 8), so that at length for us the

Proud letter I

Drops prone and void as any thoughtless dash. (J., p. 167.)

Then shall we indeed “spread light” and “feel celestially,” for we shall “crave nothing” (J., p. 68) but to sing a “song” like that of the lark,

Seraphically free  
Of taint of personality. (J., p. 69.)

Even a Callistes, who has seen the Great Mother herself, and in whom “whatsoever to men is of use” will unwittingly spring “worship of them who bestow” (J., p. 63), ceases, for all his wisdom and gratitude, to be “sane in his

song" "where the cravings begin." (J., p. 62.) For only he in whom the "dragon self" (J., pp. 14, 22) is not slain, but silenced, can become

The voice of one for millions,  
In whom the millions rejoice  
For giving their one spirit voice. (J., p. 69.)

### 3. *The Earth.*

But if indeed man realizes his derivation from lower forms of life, how shall he regard the heavenly home which has witnessed his evolution? Is the earth friend or foe to him? To the man whom Mr. Meredith would have us be her aspect and her office are a mother's that nobly loves the best in us, whose tenderness conceals itself in her pride.

From the earliest times true "souls of love," filled with an ardor for their species, have invariably "divined" a "higher breed," and striven to lead the "tidal multitude" to it from their "bestial" and "blind" condition. (R., p. 30.) They readily recognized in this their ideal, the only explanation of the Mother's else incomprehensible dealings with her child. Hers also was the "thought to speed the race." (R., p. 32.) "Her mystic secret" was so dear to her that, rather than reveal it, she would brook being misunderstood. Yet who, capable of sympathizing with "her passion for old giant kind" (R., p. 12), for "champions of race," "warriors of the sighting brain" (R., p. 30) who "give worn humanity new youth," could fail to apprehend her purpose? If she has always "scourged" or been "her offspring's executioner" (R., p. 8), it was surely for the sake of her holy vow to produce the "stouter stock" (R., p. 12).

Life is at her grindstone set,  
That she may give us edging keen." (R., p. 10.)  
Behold the life at ease: it drifts.  
The sharpened life commands its course. (R., p. 11.)

From the very beginning of man

Pain and Pleasure on each hand  
Led our wild steps from slimy rock  
To yonder sweeps of garden land (R., p. 33),



which it may take ages yet to attain and possess. "Earth yields the milk," to be sure, for the human suckling, but "she will soothe" tenderly his "need" only, "not his desire." (J., p. 119.) For her heart is full of a fury of prophetic love.

Sons of strength have been  
Her cherished offspring ever. (R., p. 33.)

As in the past, so now; as now, so always hereafter; and well she knows that wheresoever "battle urges," there "spring heroes many." (R., p. 29.)

She who dotes over ripeness at play,  
Rosiness fondles, and feeds,  
Guides it with shepherding hook  
To her sports and her pastures away. (R., p. 90.)

She who "loves laughter" (R., p. 44) and the "kindly lusts" (R., p. 43), when the "weak" "wail," "the wail animal infant" (R., pp. 12, 4), she has only a deaf ear and an iron heart.

Weep, bleed, rave, writhe, be distraught—  
She is moveless. (R., p. 88.)

Not she gives the tear for the tear. (R., p. 90.)

The child that misreads her purpose she will not spare, for it is he who needs her severity. She is proud of his very fire of hate. But of them who are her children indeed, after the spirit as well as according to the flesh, of them is she justified. He

Whom the century tempests call son,  
Having striven to rend him in vain (R., p. 76),

who has not got thew and brawn only in the conflict, but has been in the end able to "pluck brain" (R., p. 11) also, the veritable "man's mind" that knows itself the "child of her keen rod" (M. L., p. 80), rich in the "hard wisdom" which his mother earth gave him, he assuredly understands that if she seem to be of "us atomies of life alive unheeding," it is not that she hates life, but is "bent on life to come" (R., p. 12). It is clear to him that "in her clods" is the "footway to the God of gods" (J., p. 20) along which we must pass, while for the sake of her holy hope she drives us,

using, as need may be, "the spur and the curb" (J., p. 119).

She does not willfully leave us in darkness; but she gives us no more light than we can bear. "If we will," we may be "wise" "of her promptings" (R., p. 97); for surely she never ceases to whisper the suggestive words in our ears. The "woodcutter Death," who is he, if not a disguise of our Mother? We fear him, we hate him? Yet

For use he hews  
To make awake  
The spirit of what stuff we be. (R., p. 124.)

As he "clears" our globe, we may be satisfied it is, "though wood be good," for "braver" human forests. Whatever we may think, however we may feel, certain it is beyond doubt that for all of us "the end is one." "We do but wax for service." (R., p. 123.) We must actively or passively be a party to the slaying of our fellows, and some day to the slaying of us, that "our ground" "may speed the seed of younger" growths, and in due time be more royally "crowned" with life. (R., p. 124.)

Does this seem a monstrous doctrine? Shall we rebel at the thought that "we breathe but to be sword or block?" (R., p. 33.) Is not death a mere word after all? a mere mark and disguise? "The fuel, decay, brightens the fire of renewal." (R., p. 5.) If "we wot of life," it is "through death." Constantly among the living we "spy" "how each feeds each." (R., p. 53.) Here there is no exception. We are all "fed" "by Death as by Life." How if "the two" fountains of our nourishment were "one spring"—twin breasts of the same mother? "Life and Death in one"—"whichever is, the other is"—what if indeed it were so—"one—as our breath in and out?" (R., p. 97.) At all events, the birds, when they pipe

The young Earth's bacchic rout,  
The race, and the prize of the race,  
Earth's lustihead pressing to sprout (R., p. 75),

are really quite as much singing of death. Death is not the opposite of life, but of birth; and both birth and death are

but names for the single process of life, "the springing to be" (R., p. 5), "the coming" which is "young as aye," at all times the same "seedling Now." (R., p. 27.)

When at length, then, we have understood the conduct of our Mother, proved her "loving" and "reasonable," only more ideally and constantly so than we, it remains for us to imitate her example. From our double discovery as premises we must draw the ethical and spiritual conclusions with perfect courage. They who "read aright her meaning" cannot but "*devoutly* serve," for the "task" of their Mother "devolves on them." They must catch her "passion." (R., p. 13.) Nor is it as though they might refuse service.

This breath, her gift, has only choice  
Of service—breathe we in or out. (R., p. 32.)

It is only a choice between unwillful and devout service, the slave's or the son's service.

From the noble thought, then, of the Mother's "loving" and "reasonable" temper comes our first moral maxim of work, its own reward in the play of our powers and their normal increase, "Thrice hopeful on the ground we plow" (R. p. 27), deeming it "enough if we have sped the plow a season." (R., p. 56.)

A cold thing, however, will our morality be if it is not fired with love; and only that which lives can be most satisfyingly loved. We shall begin, then, our religious life with the dogma that she is a "thing alive to the living" (R., p. 98), that "her aspects mutably swerve," but "her laws immutably reign." (R., p. 97.) For

Till we conceive her living we go distraught,  
Seeing she lives, and of her joy of life  
Creatively has given us blood and breath. (J., p. 159.)

But more, not mere animation, we must come to "know" the "life of her" for "spirit." Of the farthest stars, sisters of earth, it is true that "the fire is in them whereof we are born" (R., p. 121), else how came we from one of them? When by the manifold sacraments of earth and sky and stellar heavens we have come to realize that everywhere

“life glistens on the river of the death” (R., p. 132), and we see about us among our fellow-beings “battle,” “loss,” “ache,” we shall “know” it for earth’s “pledge of vitality” inexhaustible, and with our “spirit wrought of her through strife” (J., p. 159) we shall “read her own” spirit; and because of our “love of earth,” which the singing lark instills (J., p. 67) “*trust* her down to death” (J., p. 159), even for “the *love* that lends her grace among the starry fold” (R., p. 121).

#### 4. *The Invisible.*

To many this view of man and the earth may seem atheistic. If so, it will be because they cannot believe in a “credible God.” To them there is war in heaven. Seen is arrayed against unseen. Having used their eyes to little or no purpose, they think ill of the visible, and imagine, naturally enough, an Invisible to their liking. Such, at all events, is a succinct statement of Mr. Meredith’s scrupulous apology, which took the shape of a synoptic philosophy of history in somewhat unlovely verse, classified, surely not for music’s sake, with “Songs and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth.”

That such an apology should have been written was to be expected. The poet could not remain long unaware how offensive to many must be the burden of his manly prophecy. To his worthy British public a “credible God” would hardly seem divine. Efforts to make our faiths produce into the unknown the lines of our actual knowledge, and attach our religious emotions to the common and normal rather than to the peculiar and unnatural, they would resent as gross materialism and irreverent impiety. Only one hope with this public: an appeal to precedent.

In Mr. Meredith’s loveliest idyl, “A Day with the Daughters of Hades,” the sweet girl goddess Skiagenia, born of gloom, convinces the reader that the wholesome Hellenic attitude of mingling love and awe toward the Great Mother is the very same suggested to-day by evolutionary science when envisaging what is at once most homelike and most strange

about this human star of ours, that encircles with perpetual worship her solar God of light and heat and life, concealing all the while an undefined, vast death and cold and darkness at the core. But what cares the British public for such a precedent? Has it not been led to believe that the Greeks were a spiritually shallow people, thanks to flagrant neglect of almost all that was deep in them?

So there was left for Mr. Meredith no possible way of obtaining a patient hearing for a theory which, while so obviously close at hand, found through the ages so few consistent friends, but that of apology. He must account for the general acceptance of the more fanciful hypothesis. It will not suffice to point out its fallacious character; he must also expose the nature of its insidious fascination, the source of its plausibility. In the following paragraphs the attempt shall be made, using his own words as often as possible, to state Mr. Meredith's view of the genesis of transcendentalism.

In the experience of the most undeveloped man there is much pain and little pleasure. He childishly ascribes to nature his own motives. He tortures his enemy. What then are his sufferings but the malice of a foe? But infrequent though they be, he has pleasures also. Now and then he is warmed, sheltered, and fed, his flesh thrilled with delight. Can there be one spring for bitter and sweet waters? Old men, discouraged and resentful, suggest that it is so. Pleasures are accorded by the same cruel power—a device of refined savagery to prevent the sufferer's becoming inured to his misery.

Young men, however, cannot accept this view. They observe that the old themselves continue to feed the flame of life, to fan it sedulously, to shield it from every whiff of dangerous wind. They have been occasionally thrilled by joys too intense to be held in memory as mere malevolent delusions. If Nature then must be viewed as hostile and wicked because inflicting hardship, peril, pain, they will explain their actual desire to live as an endurance of the now and the nigh because of a faith in some fictitious hereafter

and afar; and lo, we have the visible devil and the invisible God of every sensational theology—the original points of departure for all transcendental systems of thought.

Put thus, it all seems absurd—nay, repulsive enough. But the “old men” with their “sentence of inverted wit” it is impossible to tolerate. Mr. Meredith bids us, ere we take their testimony to life, inquire how they have lived. Nature clearly shows her dislike of the aged. She tolerates them only when they are sunsets to noble days.

As soon now as man’s religion has come to consist of an unnatural passion for the Invisible a strange phenomenon appears. When he is weak, defeated, despondent, when his “senses” are “pricked by fright” (R., p. 27) when he indulges in a “ventral dream of peace” (R., p. 30), the hope of a styne somewhere for slothful feeding, he becomes religious. The moment he is strong and successful, he is amused or horrified to discover that he is simply irreligious. Still he knows that strength and success may not last. It is well to provide for relapses, failures. Hence he will continue to attach a large theoretic value to “the legends that sweep” nature “aside.” (R., p. 98.) He will extol the great merits—for others, and incidentally for himself (should he be unfortunate enough to require them)—of

Assurances, symbols, saws,  
Revelations in legends, light  
To eyes rolling in darkness. (R., p. 89.)

But in due time man begins to reflect on life, to observe and generalize. He cannot but perceive how small the effect of these precious comforts in men’s hours of need. Doubt begins, then doubt of his doubt.

Nature, of course, is unnatural—that is to say, inhuman—and much remains sure. The cruelest man will in the end be moved by contortions and tears. There is in the order of things “an answer to thoughts or deeds.” (R., p. 90.) But those who “cry aloud for an opiate boon” (R., p. 98) receive small comfort from “a mother whom no cry can melt” (R., p. 91), who “will shear” the “woolly beast”

that bleats too piteously. (R., p. 89.) Yet man has ceased to be content with his original dualism. Somehow he must fit nature to his thought of the "Invisible." Hence futile metaphysics — inquiries that are doubts disguised, questions "that sew not nor spin," idle, vexatious, working only the total confusion of him who harbors them. For of course

A mind in a desolate mood,  
With the "whither" whose echo is "whence" (R., p. 103)

will become in times of distress victims of contending passions.

Now to the Invisible he raves  
To rend him from her (J., p. 107)

his unacknowledged Mother; then, his cry unanswered, he "craves her calm, her care," falling back on despised material solaces and distractions. But, so appealed to, the Mother, who else is lavish of her boons, becomes obdurate.

For the flesh in revolt at her laws  
Neither song, nor smile in ruth,  
Nor promise of things to reveal,  
Has she, nor a word she saith:  
We are asking her wheels to pause.  
Well knows she the cry of unfaith. (R., p. 89.)

Then, of course, there is nothing left to do but to turn "afresh to the Invisible," which he is pleased to imagine "can raise him high with vows of living faith." (J., p. 121.) He asks no more for relief. He has become modest in his demands. He wishes merely to have his belief affirmed by some "little sign" of "slaughtered Nature," some miracle that shall definitely prove that the power of Nature over him and his destiny has its limits. But his cry is in vain. No miracle comes. For a while he may content himself with "Legends." He may indeed lash himself to a frenzy and "conjure images." (R., p. 79.) Yet in the end, sooner or later, he will be confronted by the fact that his "cry to heaven is a cry" to the earth "he would evade" (J., p. 124), his prayer to the Invisible being really addressed to nature and obtaining from nature such an answer as it is entitled to receive. At no time, then, in man's his-

tory has he conceived of the manly religion suited to his hours of strength and success. Let us not be dupes of professions. The British people vociferously sing,

O Paradise, O Paradise,  
Who doth not crave for rest?  
Who would not seek that happy land, etc.,

while in fact they build up an empire with immense toil, showing that they mean to possess as much of the earth as they can, even if they jeopardize their heavenly inheritance by a lack of meekness! Actions speak louder than words. As a matter of history, who were the kind of men that have been worshiped as heroes? Those who indulged in slavish howls? who complained, pleaded for mercy? who offered a price for ease and happiness? Nothing of the sort. Always the hero, he whom men approved and wished to resemble, was

A creature matched with strife  
To meet it as a bride (J., p. 116)

“through self-forgetfulness divine” (J., p. 70). Surely always, whatever our theological dualism and philosophical pessimism, it was men whose “love of earth was deep” that we set apart for the practical worship of imitation. They always were unspeculative men, who could join in the song of the woodland sprites:

We question not, nor ask  
The silent to give sound,  
The hidden to unmask,  
The distant to draw near. (R., p. 53.)

They despised—even when they did not understand—

Our sensual dreams  
Of the yearning to touch, to feel  
The dark impalpable sure,  
To have the unveiled appear. (R., p. 90.)

They assumed themselves, with a magnificent humility, to be revelations and incarnations of the spirit of earth. They refused worship, were unostentatious, took their virtue for granted, content to “serve and pass reward.” In their heart of hearts, whatever their external religious conformity,



they pitied him who "will not read" nature; who, "good or wise" (J., p. 120), preferring "with passion self-obscured" to see her distorted through a subjective medium,

Through terror, through distrust;  
The greed to touch, to view, to have, to live. (J., p. 121.)

Even at the present day, then, though transcendentalists in the closet, and theoretically disloyal to earth, in their hero worship men prove that there is a deeper, saner, devouter religion deep in their hearts. In their hours of strength and success they feel it; but they are prevented from taking it seriously, because it seems so inconsistent with what they have been taught to regard as sacred. Yet in it is the bitter tonic which we need in our sentimental hours when we cry for the opiates. Mr. Meredith believes, then, that the religion of man in nature, the worship of strength, beauty, courage, magnanimity, is not so unfamiliar to us. Can we not join the hymn of the heroes?

Let our trust be firm in Good,  
Though we be of the fasting;  
Our questions are a mortal brood,  
Our work is everlasting.  
We children of Beneficence  
Are in its being sharers;  
And "whither" vainer sounds than "whence"  
For word with such wayfarers. (R., p. 57.)

In a future paper an effort will be made to show in what way this tonic will do the work of the coveted opiate; how, in Mr. Meredith's view, it comforts, makes strong, and therefore consoles more effectively than sentimental fictions of transcendentalists. WILLIAM NORMAN GUTHRIE.